



# DAVID SMYTON and THE LIFTERS

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## I

It is on an almost forgotten episode in the ecclesiastical history of the 18th century in Scotland that I wish to focus your attention. Despite the voluminous literature that the controversy produced, it might have sunk into complete oblivion, but for two reminders.

Burns' enthusiasts have disinterred David Smyton, through the poet's casual references to him, which are anything but complimentary. The most definite is in a letter of 1787 to Margaret Chalmers—"The whining cant of love, except in real passion, and by a masterly hand, is to me as insufferable as the preaching cant of old Father Smeaton, Whig minister at Kilmaurs." It must be recalled that David Smyton had been for nineteen years a minister when Robert Burns was born and had been nearly fifty years in the ministry when this letter was written. Had Burns been born earlier and been fortunate enough to encounter David Smyton in his prime, his antipathy might have been quite as marked, but it would not have been mingled with contempt.

The second reminder came in 1872 in Dean Stanley's *Lectures on the History of the Church of Scotland*, when the name Lifter awoke the Dean's interest at a time when the Elevation of the Host was a burning issue in his own Church. How many Scottish pens since have made merry at the inept comparison of the ignorant Englishman! I went back to the lectures to find the precise form in which this confusion of his found expression. To my astonishment it was not in the text as delivered but in a note added to the first lecture which runs (p. 36):—"Even in detail some of the Eucharistic controversies which agitate Episcopal Churches have broken out on the like questions in Scotland. There was in the last century a long ritual dispute between a presbyter and his presbytery exactly analogous to that which was recently raised by the English ritualists and their opponents, respecting the elevation of the consecrated elements. It took the form of a Schism between Lifters and Anti-Lifters, which at last merged in the Old and New Lights."

To my mind the origin of this note is fairly clear. When preparing his lectures in his Deanery at Westminster, with the standard works before him which he has enumerated in his preface, this phase of Scottish Church history had not appeared above his horizon. But, after the lectures, when he was expatiating on his trouble with the Elevators, one of his Scottish friends—not, I think, Principal Tulloch, more probably the minister of the church in which the lectures were given, Dr. Wallace of Greyfriars—saw a good chance of pulling his leg. “Mr. Dean,” he said “we had the same trouble in Scotland nearly 100 years ago. We called them the Lifters. But they got short shrift from us. They had a very short and troubled life, and for two generations they have been quite extinct.” No one, I am convinced, could have been more surprised than the leg-puller to find his mischievous suggestion solemnly incorporated in a learned note in the published lectures.

So, it is only the casual and misleading references of Robert Burns and Arthur Penrhyn Stanley which have kept the Lifters from sinking into complete oblivion. But, having spent the free time of several months with the sources, printed and MSS, I am going to make the attempt to reconstruct this very cryptic episode in 18th century history, and to indicate how men were driven to take up the almost incredible position that they did. Although, as we shall see, Josiah Hunter of Falkirk is, by some, regarded as the moving spirit in this temporary schism, it is David Smyton and the men by whom he was surrounded who must bear at least ninety per cent of the responsibility.

## II

We know nothing of David Smyton till he makes his appearance at Perth at the opening of the Session of Mr. William Wilson's Theological class in 1737. Two men, who will appear again in our study, were then entering their second year:—John Hunter and Adam Gib. Licensed in 1740, Mr. Smyton was at once called to Balfron. But a somewhat belated claim was put in by Kilmaurs. The youthful associate Presbytery decided in its favour, since the desirability of establishing a cause in the South-west was evident. From 1733, praying societies all over Ayrshire had been receiving occasional supply of sermon from the four brethren. It had come to be recognised that the situation was ripe for a settled pastorate. It might have been anticipated that Kilmarnock or Ayr would be selected as the natural centre for the new venture. But two circumstances worked in favour of Kilmaurs. A local laird, Hugh Thomson of Tourhill, who had

once been Parish minister, and whose reputation as a pioneer in farming methods had spread beyond his immediate locality, led a strong Praying Society there till his death in 1731. This society was still flourishing when in 1738 there took place a glaring case of Intrusion, as a result of which the great bulk of the congregation including the elders and the magistrates of the burgh, leaving the Parish Church, attached themselves to the Praying Society, and asked to be taken under the wing of the Associate Presbytery. So, at Kilmaurs, David Smyton was ordained in November, 1740. But not as minister of Kilmaurs alone. He was responsible, at the outset, for the Secession cause in the whole of Ayrshire. From time to time, new regulations were made for the conduct of his ministry, e.g. under one distribution of his time he was to preach on four Sabbaths of the year at Fenwick (4 miles East), on four at Ayrsmoss (18 miles South), on six at Dalry (9 miles North-West), on two at Kilwinning (7 miles West)—the remaining thirty-six to be divided between Kilmaurs and Stewarton. And the records show him at baptisms, weddings and funerals far beyond the bounds of his regular preaching stations. In Dr. William Reid's *The Merchant Evangelist*, a memoir of William McGavin, there is (p. 4) a much quoted reference as to the implications of this wide-spread ministry. "Mr. McGavin's parents were members of the Secession, and were wont to travel each Sabbath on horseback—one horse sufficient for both—to Kilmaurs, a distance of twenty miles, to attend upon the ministry of the Rev. Mr. Smyton".† I suspect some exaggeration here, trifling as to the distance, considerable, as to the "each Sabbath." There was no intention of making the congregation as peripatetic as the minister. At intervals, they would gather from "a' the airts" at Kilmaurs, at Communion seasons and on those high occasions set apart for a renewal of the Secession Bond, when the meeting house, designed to deal with such an influx would be full to overflowing. But normally on days when there was no preaching within range, the local members would meet as a Praying Society for the religious exercises connected therewith.

The first twenty years of David Smyton's ministry was a period of continuous success. He became known in the whole area as a powerful preacher, an assiduous pastor and a resolute leader. Earlier historians have singled out as typical the action taken in 1745, when Prince Charles Edward had reached Stirling and it seemed as though nothing could stop him. The Kirk Session met to consider the emergency and passed the

† I imagine that it was his memory of this passage which led to the note which Dr. W. J. Couper appended to his study of the Moravians in Scotland in Vol. V. p. 57 of these transactions, where William Smyton should of course be David: But the reference of the Moravian missionary, as is indicated by the area of the encounter and the date, was probably to Rev. Robert Smith, ordained at Auchinleck in 1763.



following resolution which, although it appears in a note (p. 401) in MacKelvie's *Annals and Statistics of the United Presbyterian Church*, merits reprinting here.

Kilmaurs, 21st December, 1745 . . . Taking into our consideration the present call in Providence necessitating us and others to appear in arms for the defence of the Covenanted Reformation sworn to in these lands, and also in defence of our Civil liberties, both of which are evidently struck at by a Popish Pretender and his adherents ; we therefore enact, that we shall go in person or others in our place, for the support and defence of our principles : showing, at the same time, that we own only our Protestant King, George II. But we are not hereby to be construed as countenancing anything that is wrong in the administration, or practice, or any part thereof : and we do this for the encouragement of others of our communion, who are willing and able to support and defend the same cause ; and further, we resolve to take arms by ourselves and only with those of our own profession . . . David Smyton, Moderator, Samuel Harper, Session-clerk.

Despite the reservations of this document, its spirit seems to have impressed the government authorities so deeply that arms were issued and an officer sent to drill them. There is no record, however, and not even a tradition, of their employment, when equipped and trained.

Resoluteness, however, was not so marked a feature of Mr. Smyton's next public action. Within two years there took place the disastrous breach between Burgher and Anti-burgher. Mr. Smyton was present at the decisive Synod of 1747. He was quite convinced that the religious clause of the Burgess Oath could not be taken by any member of the Associate Synod who was loyal to the Secession testimony. But he did not think that brethren who thought otherwise should be extruded from them, as lepers from the whole. So he busied himself with formulas of accommodation and compromise. When all these were rejected by Adam Gib and the Antiburghers, he remained with the Burgher Synod, making no secret of the fact, however, that he did not share their views of the innocuousness of the Oath. So, for a few weeks, Kilmaurs would be on the roll of the Burgher Synod. But no amount of explanation could make his action acceptable, or even intelligible, to his Kirk Session. In all likelihood they had been debating the issues in unofficial conclaves during his absence, and had come to the conclusion that the true spiritual home of all who, like themselves and their minister, condemned the taking of the Burgess Oath, was with the Anti-burghers. At a Kirk Session meeting the question was debated ; and the decision to adhere to them was unanimous. At their next meeting, Mr. Smyton and an elder were appointed

to represent the congregation at the General Associate (anti-burgher) Synod. This they did "with proper confessions of their sinful steps and compliances" i.e. Mr. Smyton's compliance at the last meeting of Synod. I imagine that this transfer of allegiance led some to picture David Smyton as a resolute man indeed, but surrounded by even more resolute men to whose judgement he must conform. Such, however, was not the general opinion, for, two years later, he was elected Moderator of Synod, and, for thirty years thereafter, he was a highly honoured brother, entrusted by the Synod with many a diverse responsibility.

But to return to Ayrshire. So successful was Mr. Smyton's ministry there, that many outlying parts of his congregation grew strong enough to feel that they would like to have, and were able to support, a minister of their own. With the approval of the Synod, new congregations in full status were formed at Colmonell (1760), Auchinleck (1763), Kilwinning (1763), Ayr (1772) and Newmilns (1773). Against all or almost all of these disjunctions, the Kirk Session of Kilmaurs made somewhat tepid protests. But they were thoroughly roused when Kilmarnock (2½ miles away) without any prior consultation with them, made a direct appeal to the Presbytery of Glasgow. Doubtless the Kilmarnock brethren knew that they would have to face the determined opposition of the Kirk Session; but, to their mind, the situation was really urgent. Two years before, a Burgher Kirk had been established in their town. Were they, the Anti-burghers, who formed the earlier and more powerful group, to see their cause dwindle because they had no place of worship in their midst and no minister of their own? With express speed, they obtained from the Presbytery a Deed disjoining Kilmarnock. Inevitably, the minister and Kirk Session of Kilmaurs protested and appealed to the Synod, accompanying the Protest and Appeal with "a very long paper entitled *Information from the People of Kilmaurs*, stressing the apprehended inconveniency and dangerous consequences of the disjunction of Kilmarnock from Kilmaurs" (Scroll Minutes of the General Associate Synod Vol. iv. p. 26). A very long debate followed round two motions. One was to delay the whole matter, that the case might be reconsidered by the Presbytery of Glasgow. This received very considerable support in the debate. But the motion that was adopted "by a great majority" (Ibid. p. 27) ran as follows:—"The Synod expresses its dissatisfaction with the rashness and animosity with which the people of Kilmarnock pushed the disjunction before the Presbytery of Glasgow, by which that Presbytery seemed to have been shut up to grant the disjunction. Yet, as matters now stand before the Synod, the Synod does not find it to be for the comfort or edification of either side to reverse it and that, therefore, they affirm the sentence of Presbytery disjoining certain persons in and about Kilmarnock

from the congregation of Kilmaurs and erecting them into a distinct congregation by themselves : And that the Synod enjoin the Presbytery of Glasgow to discharge any steps being taken towards any future disjunctions either at Stewarton or any other part of the congregation of Kilmaurs " (Ibid. pp. 26-27) Mr. Smyton protested against this decision " as destructive to his congregation and ministry " (Ibid. p. 27). This was in September, 1776 and, within a year, the Anti-burgher Congregation of Kilmarnock had an able and eloquent young minister placed over them in the person of Rev. James Robertson, M.A.

For the next ten of the half-yearly meetings of Synod, though there is very occasionally an elder from Kilmaurs, the minister is uniformly noted as an absentee. I have little doubt that many of the brethren felt that he was absenting himself " in a huff " at that decision, as Adam Gib had been doing for an even longer time after a similar rebuff. But by 1778, rumours were afoot that there was more in it than that, that the whole area was seething with discussions as to proper and defective methods of the observance of the Lord's Supper.

Now, it is perfectly plain that the general custom in both East and West was for the officiating minister to follow closely our Lord's own actions at the institution and to begin by lifting the bread which was to be set apart for its holy use. But a minority had been accustomed to postpone all lifting of the bread till they took it in their hands, after the communion prayer, in order to break it and to distribute. On both sides, it had been purely a custom and no one seems to have thought it unseemly if representatives of both customs officiated at the same communion

In the West, the lifting seems to have been almost universal. But now, there had come from the East, a minister who ostentatiously refrained from doing it, and was not slow to defend his action. Although he is never named, there can be little doubt that he was Rev. James Robertson of Kilmarnock. " The ground of this controversy, with us being new," said the complainants in their *Apology and Vindication* (p. ii), which will be dealt with later. But a keen-eyed and well-informed Burgher opponent (John Thomson) said that it was, by no means new, that, indeed, " the same ground of offence had existed for many years and no offence had been taken." (*Remarks, etc.* p. 7). And here, taking this and other hints of the pamphlets into consideration, I hazard at reconstruction. In 1763 Auchinleck had been disjoined. It had secured as minister, Rev. Robert Smith, of whom his most distinguished member—the William McGavin already referred to—wrote " He was a man of feeble and deformed body, such as I suppose Alexander Pope to have been, but of a most acute and vigorous mind." More than once he assisted Mr. Smyton at Kilmaurs



communions. He may quite well have been the non-lifter that the warlike band tolerated—on the plea of their minister that one could hardly demand lifting from one so sorely handicapped. But James Robertson was another story. He not only refrained from lifting, but justified his action by arguments from the armoury of Adam Gib. This would account for the manifest bitterness of Mr. Smyton and his band. They could get rid of some of the venom accumulating in their systems since the disjunction of Kilmarnock by discharging it on the practices of the minister of whom the upstart congregation was so proud. This brings us to the Lifter controversy as waged in Church Courts.

### III

At some time during 1780, it seems to have occurred to those who had been busy in agitation and propaganda—of whom the most fanatical seems to have been Mr. Bryce Kerr, an elder from Beith—that the time was ripe to ask for an ecclesiastical decision that the common practice of lifting was the only legitimate one. Representations to that effect were made to the Presbytery of Glasgow, calling for a decision. The minutes of the Presbytery are not, so far as I can trace, extant, but the Presbytery must, more than once, have found reasons for refusing to discuss the representations at all, through informalities in the method of their transmission. But, in process of time the Representers learned enough about Church Law, to get more than one through, satisfying strict legal procedure. The Presbytery, with notable caution, resolved to transmit them to the Synod *simpliciter*. The Synod of April 1782 came to a finding which their Clerk omitted to minute, but was forced, in the minutes of the Synod of September, 1782, to record as having been agreed upon at the earlier meeting viz. “The Synod unanimously agree in giving this advice and direction to the brethren of Glasgow Presbytery, that they exercise a forbearance with one another in this matter; that they inform the people that the Synod reckon it very unjustifiable for them to impose their judgements on others in this matter; and that they deal with them to guard against reflections upon those who observe a different practice from what they think best; and that, if they find it difficult to deal with the people, they call in the assistance of ministers of other Presbyteries, as they find it necessary” (*Ibid.* pp. 283-4). The Presbytery had evidently accepted this advice and were proceeding to put it into operation, when dissidents in the congregations of Kilmaurs, Paisley, Greenock, Kilwinning and Beith intimated their Protest against the Synod’s refusal or neglect to consider the comparative merits of the two practices.

So the matter came before the Synod of September, 1782, A field day



was evidently expected. But, immediately after the contents of the Protest and Appeal had been laid before the Synod, Adam Gib entered a Protest against going on to debate the matter at all. He succeeded, despite some demur, in having that Protest inserted in the minutes (pp. 307-8) :—" Whereas several ministers of this Synod, of whom I am one, when dispensing the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in our congregations, do not practise the taking or lifting up of a part of the bread and wine, with a laying or setting of the same down again, before consecration, or before setting them apart by prayer from a common to a holy use—only taking up these elements, when so consecrated, for breaking and distributing the same ; in which method of procedure we apprehend ourselves to be warranted yea, to which we reckon ourselves obligated by Scripture and reason and our Subordinate Standards : and whereas *we* have never attempted to disturb the peace of the church by stating and prosecuting any quarrel with our brethren of a different practice, leaving them to their own freedom, as to the said first taking or lifting up . . . But, whereas a brother of Glasgow Presbytery has been labouring very industriously and very effectually, in begetting a ferment among the people and raising many of them up into a seditious clamour against our said method of procedure in dispensing that sacrament, as if the same were sinful and scandalous and, whereas the said brother and his partisans, who are attempting to get that affair pressed into a general manner of discussion by this Synod, cannot pretend that they are thereby seeking relief from any impositions upon themselves, or a redress of any evil supposed to take place under the Synod's authority : but it is most unquestionable, that their whole attempt, in this matter, is only meant as a material and underhand or secret attack upon us, as to our said method of procedure. I, therefore, do hereby PROTEST, for myself and for all others upon whom this covert attack is made—that the said brother and his partisans cannot fairly and honestly bring this affair before the Synod, except in the way of a formal and particular complaint upon us, exhibiting special articles against us—with a specification of the passages of the Holy Scriptures and of our subordinate standards, and of our ordination vows, which we are supposed to contravene or trample upon by our said method of procedure : and that this Synod cannot regularly give them a hearing upon this affair, in any other manner ; and that any proposal by them for a hearing upon it in any other manner, or in the manner now attempted, ought to be *simpliciter* rejected in common justice to us, that we may not be struck at underhand, or in a deceitful, injurious manner, but in the way of a fair and open trial, upon which we are ready to answer for our conduct. And upon all this, I take instruments.

Adam Gib."

Despite the Protest, the Synod proceeded to discuss the question and finally re-affirmed the decision of the earlier Synod that there ought to be a mutual forbearance on this question. Upon this decision being intimated, Mr. Smyton rose to protest, but was prevailed upon to depart from his intention, "upon a promise being given him, that the door should be open for his exonerating himself, on an after occasion." (*Ibid.* p. 284).

Mr. Smyton appeared at the Synod of May, 1783 and, at some length, craved that the Synod should reverse their Deed and begin to consider the case *de novo*. The Synod appointed one committee after another to converse with Mr. Smyton and found him unalterably attached to his position. He, in turn, seems to have felt himself badgered : and finally, he gave in a lengthy declaration of Secession from the Synod of which the essential paragraphs are these :—" I find myself obliged to make a Secession from this Associate Synod and Presbyteries thereunto subordinate." " I hereby declare my resolution, through grace, constantly to adhere to our Reformation standards of doctrine, worship, discipline and government " " I protest that, notwithstanding of this my secession, my pastoral relation to the congregation of Kilmaurs, shall be held firm and valid, that they shall not be under the inspection of the Synod or Presbytery from henceforth " (*Apology and Vindication* pp. 121-2). And Thomas Wright, representative elder to the Synod from the congregation of Kilmaurs asked his adherence to this declaration of Secession to be recorded. (*Ibid.* pp. 122-3).

An action like this would normally have been followed by deposition. But milder counsels prevailed. After all, he was a highly esteemed senior who had done notable work in extending the bounds of the Secession. He was now very old and, had apparently been prodded on by over-zealous elders. So, the sentence pronounced was that of Suspension. Yet it must be so worded that those behind his action would feel the Synod's displeasure. So the sentence ran " The synod, considering the foresaid grossly schismatical, absolutely groundless and highly undutiful conduct of Mr. David Smyton, minister of the Gospel at Kilmaurs, they did and hereby do, in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, the alone King and Head of His Church, by virtue of the powers committed by Him to them, as a Court constituted in His name, actually suspend Him from the exercise of his ministry—prohibiting him from all and any present exercise thereof in the Church of Christ " (Scroll Minutes p. 328). And they appointed Rev. Robert Smith of Auchinleck to intimate the sentence in the congregation at Kilmaurs on the last Sabbath of the month.

#### IV

To continue as a solitary minister devoid of all ecclesiastical connection was an unthinkable position for one who was such an ingrained Presby-

terian as David Smyton. Which brings us to Josiah Hunter of Falkirk who, at the moment, was exercising his ministry in an equal degree of isolation. A much younger man, he was a son of that John Hunter who had been a senior fellow-student of David Smyton. The ordination of John Hunter at Morebattle a year before David Smyton at Kilmaurs had been one of the offences which led to the deposition of the eight brethren some six months later. He was not included in the sentence, for he had died before the trial, after a ministry of less than three months. The memory of John Hunter was fragrant among the seceders, for had not Ralph Erskine described him as "a burning and shining light that burnt so fast and shone so bright that it is little to be wondered at that he did not burn and shine long." His son Josiah—a mere boy when his father died—was not destined to leave so fragrant a memory. Ordained at Falkirk in 1758, he found himself minister of a small Anti-burgher congregation in a town where the Burghers were much stronger. Tensions developed between a section of the congregation, including two elders, and himself, the actual causes of which elude discovery. By 1773, the situation had become so intolerable to the minister, that he brought the case before the Synod, complaining of the inveterate disloyalty of a clique among his people. Thenceforward, there is hardly a single meeting of Synod in which the Falkirk case does not bulk largely in the minutes. Committees of pacification were sent down to Falkirk, terms of reconciliation were carefully drawn up and agreed to by both parties. But all was of no avail. Continually the quarrel broke out afresh. The Synod came reluctantly to the conclusion that, while there may have been provocations, it was the angular temperament of Mr. Hunter that was most to blame. It was decided to administer a rebuke. To Mr. Hunter, this was plain injustice. He developed what approximated to a persecution-mania and made wild accusations about the pre-conceived prejudices of some of his brethren; and finally, read a paper in which he declined the jurisdiction of what he declared was in no way a lawful court of Jesus Christ. The inevitable result of this was his deposition in 1781, which was carried through without a single dissenting voice. The majority of his small congregation adhered to him, and dissatisfied elements in other congregations began to find their way to Falkirk. The reason for this was that they considered Mr. Hunter an ill-used man. He and his congregation assiduously circulated the report that the Synod's action had been taken not on the local squabble, but to get rid of a man of whose theology they disapproved, but were not prepared to make of it a direct issue.

In 1776, when the dispute had already been consuming the time of the Synod for three years, Mr. Hunter had issued a pamphlet on the Scriptural method of observing the Lord's Supper, which was the first time, so far as



I have been able to discover, that the Lifter case was advocated in print ; and in 1779, he issued another on a Christological question much debated at the time :—the double Sonship of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is almost impossible to state briefly the point at issue. To do justice to it would need another paper. But it arose from a later refinement of the Federal Theology which added to the covenant of works and the covenant of grace a covenant of redemption. Now, the triune God could in no sense be thought of as making a covenant with one member of that ineffable triunity, so the eternally begotten Son of God must be thought of as having been constituted before time as Son of God—Son of Man—Mediator. Only in such a case was anything that could be called a Covenant possible within the Godhead ; and the Covenant of Redemption was to them the essential keystone of the Federal Theology. Mr. Hunter's supporters were so clamorous in their assertions that these views on Theology were the real grounds of his deposition, that the Clerk of Synod was compelled to issue a pamphlet entitled, *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Associate Synod against Mr. Josiah Hunter, sometime minister of the Gospel at Falkirk*, which is a very full and fair transcript of the records, interspersed with a brief connecting narrative, which is not so conspicuously unbiased. This did not destroy the conviction of not a few in the neighbourhood that Mr. Hunter was a man of real vision who had unjustly suffered for his faith, and disjunctions continued to take place from other Anti-burgher congregations as far away as Cumbernauld.

Now, there is no trace in the minutes of Synod that Mr. Smyton or any of the Ayrshire Lifters had, either by voice or vote, supported Mr. Hunter at any point in the proceedings ; and his deposition took place, as I said, without a single dissentient. But when Mr. Smyton was suspended in May, 1783 it was natural that their two isolated flocks should seek some rapprochement. The road to affiliation was not without its pitfalls. When Mr. Hunter and an elder duly elected for the purpose, came to Kilmaurs during that summer, they had a rough passage with the elders there. So closely did they cross-examine him on his doctrine of the Double Sonship and so stoutly did he, in turn, maintain his ground, that it seemed there could be no other issue than a perpetual theological squabble. But, at last, Mr. Smyton suggested that he and Mr. Hunter should retire for a private conference. At that conference, Mr. Smyton must have insisted that, while the doctrine of the Double Sonship might be tolerated within the new body, it could not be written into its constitution. Mr. Hunter must have agreed, provided he be allowed to continue openly to maintain it. So the Lifter Presbytery was founded on the simple formula—Anti-burgher constitution plus Lifting. But it never called itself the Lifter Presbytery. It added confusion to the nomenclature of the time by



reverting to the original name of the Associate Presbytery. And, after Mr. Smyton's death, it came to be known as the Associate Presbytery of Falkirk.

The records of that Presbytery are, so far as I can discover, no longer extant. So the story of its growth and extinction has to be pieced together from other sources. It was a sore disappointment that the minister of Beith, who had been with them in their earliest approaches to Presbytery, refused to join them, being in all probability, deterred by the excesses of some of his own Kirk Session. But a compensation came in 1785. In that year, Rev. John Proudfoot of Leith joined them with the great bulk of his congregation. Now, Mr. Proudfoot, though retaining the affections of the great majority of his own people, had a very drab record in the Church courts. His first appearance before the Synod was for refusing to go, as a probationer, on a mission to America, to which he had been designated. His next two were over the matter of intruding into the Edinburgh congregation of Adam Gib, from which Leith had been disjoined. But, in 1780, he had to plead guilty to a charge of "tippling" and, after rebuke, was given another chance. For years he seems to kept himself free from offence. But in 1785 he was again arraigned for relapsing "into that behaviour for which he had been rebuked" In that year he was deposed. While, so far as is known, he had never spoken a word or given a vote in favour of Mr. Smyton or Mr. Hunter, he and his congregation now applied to the Lifter Presbytery and were welcomed into fellowship. As a result, they could now boast of three congregations with ministers. Only one other minister, so far as I can gather was admitted from outside and he without a congregation. We learn of him from the minutes of the Relief Synod for 1789, where it is recorded that the Rev. Michael Arthur, M.A., admitted two years before and now resident in Edinburgh, had "connected himself with another society." Now, Michael Arthur had been another stormy petrel of the Anti-burgher Squad. Minister at Peebles, he had been Moderator of Synod in 1779. As retiring moderator he had preached a sermon in which he had deplored the disastrous Breach of 1747. Adam Gib who, as he says, had imperfectly heard the sermon, was aghast when he read it as published. It was a foul attack on himself and on all that the Anti-burgher Church stood for. He proceeded, as the minutes show, to make life intolerable for the audacious young rebel. And, in due time, he brought it about that Mr. Arthur was forced to resign his new charge at Aberdeen in 1786. Mr. Arthur moved to Edinburgh, bent on getting his revenge on Adam Gib, whom he proceeded persistently to annoy from the vantage-ground of the Relief Church. But so many old enemies of Adam Gib were now congregated in the Lifter Presbytery that they drew him to themselves, receiving him as a minister without charge and as a full

member of Presbytery, representing Edinburgh. At this point, mention should be made of one even more anomalous case. From 1789 to 1793, there was a congregation at Perth which arose out of dissidents from a call to Perth North (Anti-burgher). Finding efforts to obtain sanction for a second Anti-burgher church in the city foiled at every turn, they got into touch with the " Lifters " and put up a building which seems to have been known, locally as Paul's Chapel. There was a young Anti-burgher probationer, called David Wilson, whose general sympathy with the Lifters changed to definite adherence when he received a call from this tiny body. Ordained by the Lifter's Presbytery towards the end of 1789, he was fated to face three years of tensions, squabbles and desertions until in 1793, he was admitted by the Relief Synod as a probationer and was called to Pittenweem in 1794. The building, deserted by the Lifters was to house, in the years that followed, a succession of other dissident groups.

But these five were not the only ministers. From the beginning they professed themselves ready to license ministers and to train them for license. There was no regular Divinity Hall and we can only surmise where and how they were trained. It is fairly certain that Mr. Hunter was responsible for the training of Mr. William Robertson, a recent licentiate, who was ordained as colleague to Mr. David Smyton at Kilmaurs in 1787. For the ordination was held up for some months through a complaint by a group of elders about his orthodoxy. Was this the Double Sonship question raising its head again? It is also fairly certain that the Rev. John Gemmill, ordained at Dalry was a pupil of Mr. Smyton. He was a rather remarkable young man. In addition to attending to the congregation at Dalry, he matriculated at Glasgow University: managed, somehow, to put in the requisite attendances and to qualify for the degree of Doctor of Medicine. And, as though that were not enough, he had a printing press of his own in Dalry and in Beith, not a few of the productions of which I have seen. We shall encounter him again, but, meanwhile, I note that he spent the last twenty-two years of his life in Canada, but whether as printer, doctor or minister, or all three is, by no means, certain. A third licentiate was the Rev. William Arthur. There is little doubt that he received his theological training from his father who was well qualified to give it, especially in polemical divinity. He was licensed in 1789, the very year in which his father acceded. In that same year, some dissidents from Adam Gib's congregation, calling themselves Smytonites, rented an unoccupied church in Lady Lawson's Wynd. There can be no doubt that this step was taken at the prompting of the father. They proceeded to call the son who was ordained over them in May, 1790. His success cannot have been marked for, three years later, he is found applying to the Relief Church for admission. We are not surprised that, in view of their experience with

the father, they declined to accept him. In 1796, he removed to Pennsylvania, where, for many years, he exercised a highly esteemed ministry in the Presbyterian church. These are all the ministers of the Lifter Presbytery that I have been able to trace. There were probably others, for one of the complaints of Mr. Gemmill of Dalry was that the Presbytery licensed and ordained men, whose only recommendation was, that they had made their original denomination too hot to hold them. But, in addition there were adherents of the cause in various places, who obtained occasional supply. One group was in Stranraer. The minister of the Anti-burgher Kirk there, William Drysdale, had been accustomed to speak much in favour of Mr. Smyton and his contentions. But when Mr. Smyton seceded, he declined going with him. So, a body of his people calling themselves Smytonians, separated. We only know of them because of the fact that, now reduced to twenty-three heads of families, they, in 1793, applied for sermon to the Burgher Presbytery of Glasgow.

A number of other similar groups may have had occasional supply. But, at no time in its history, could the Lifter Presbytery boast of more than six fully-constituted congregations.

Two deaths paved the way to its dissolution. One was that of Adam Gib in 1788, which removed the strongest bond of union, a common antagonism to that dominant figure. The other, a year later, was that of David Smyton who seems, in his old age, to have remained the wise and resolute leader of a restive team, able to keep even Josiah Hunter in his place. Almost as soon as the leader had been removed, the deputy leader began to assert himself. He induced the Presbytery to soft-pedal the Lifter issue, as not an adequate basis for a continued separation and to put in its place the doctrine of the Double Sonship, which Mr. Smyton had consistently refused to accept. This was too much for the Ayrshire men, in particular, Mr. Gemmill of Dalry who, in 1791, confronted the Presbytery, meeting at Falkirk with a representation of grievances from the Kirk Session of his congregation. Seven grievances were enumerated, but the main one, as was natural, was the replacement of the original issue by Mr. Hunter's pet theological aberration. On this representation being rejected, Mr. Gemmill put in a document which he called "Declaration of Secession from the Associate Presbytery, by John Gemmill, minister of the Gospel at Dalry." This speaks of, to give a few quotations from it "the new and unwarrantable terms of communion" (p. 45), the un-presbyterian, indeed, "Lordly and magisterial way of bringing new matter into the Church" (p. 25) "What gave ground to our Secession, is passed over almost in oblivion and what gave no ground for it, taken more particular notice of" (p. 24). "Wherefore, upon the above grounds



and reasons, I judge it my duty to DECLARE and PROTEST, like as I hereby declare and protest, that I find myself under the necessity of making a Secession from this Associate Presbytery." And, so Josiah Hunter was relegated to that isolation in which he had earlier existed for two years. If, until the Arthurs left for America in 1796, he could still live under the illusion that he belonged to a Presbytery, the Associate Presbytery of Falkirk, it could no longer be called a Lifter Presbytery. The one genuine remnant of the Lifter enthusiasm was in Dalry, with certain preaching points throughout Ayrshire and Renfrewshire, which continued to fly the Lifter flag until Dr. Gemmill migrated to Canada in 1822.

And now we have to enquire what happened to the congregations and stations of the Associate Presbytery. We begin with Kilmaurs. David Smyton did not carry with him all his members in Kilmaurs and Stewarton, or even all his elders. A considerable party adhered to the Anti-burgher Synod. For years they worshipped in a tent. Naturally, they began to ask "Why should they put up with this most inadequate provision, when the perfectly good meeting house which they had helped to erect, was being used by another body, simply because their minister had left the fold? So a law-action began, taken, it is to be noted, not by the Synod, but by the local Anti-burgher congregation. They lost it, on the ground that Mr. Smyton had not been finally cut off from the Synod, but only suspended by it. So they proceeded to build a permanent meeting-house for themselves in the area of the tent. Worship continued in Mr. Smyton's meeting-house after his death. The colleague we have already mentioned was starved out, deliberately. Another colleague or rather a successor—a Mr. Wilson—who must have been one of the otherwise unrecorded probationers of the Associate Presbytery was on the point of being settled, when that Presbytery ceased to function. The faithful few attached themselves to Mr. Gemmill of Dalry, but his services at Kilmaurs were necessarily few and far between. Occasional supply of sermon was given by the minister of the Cameronian Kirk at Crookedholm. Then came the second law-suit. Kirk and manse were claimed by three parties:—the Kirk session and managers of the Secession Kirk of Kilmaurs, who already possessed a much better building and did not propose to use either church or manse; the Reformed Presbyterians of Crookedholm who had permitted their minister to officiate there on occasion and who had obtained a conveyance of a kind from the trustees; and Rev. Dr. John Gemmill of Dalry who claimed to be the only person who was able to continue, as he had indeed been doing, the work of David Smyton. After prolonged and complicated pleadings, the Court of Session awarded them



to the local Anti-burgher Kirk, which promptly sold them to meet, or to help to meet, the expenses of the case. For the most part, those who had been accustomed to meet there rejoined their brethren in what was called the New Kirk. A few continued for a short time to travel to Dalry. This genuine remnant of the Lifter cause came to an end in 1822, with the migration of its minister to Canada. The local members seem to have joined the United Secession Church there, which was a Burgher foundation. I take it that the outlying members in Beith, Kilwinning and elsewhere, also entered the united Secession. The Edinburgh Congregation, after the departure of the two Arthurs for Pennsylvania, was accepted as a congregation by the Burghers, on condition that they found a better location. Having found this in the Portsburgh area, they took on a new lease of life and are the ancestors of the Lauriston Place Church of to-day. On Mr. Proudfoot's death, the Leith congregation, after having had some experience of occasional supply from the Lifter Presbytery, applied in the end of 1787 to be received as a Burgher congregation and, from this reception there, has sprung the congregation of Kirkgate. The congregation with longest life was that of Falkirk the strength of which, however, was not derived from the town itself but from Dennyloanhead, Denny and particularly from Cumbernauld. They had originally been drawn to Mr. Hunter when he stood alone, and they continued their support when once more he stood alone. The father of a notable minister, Dr. James Stark of Dennyloanhead, had been one of Mr. Hunter's most fervent admirers. In the memoir of that son, prefixed to a collection of his sermons (*Posthumous Discourses of the late Rev. James Stark, D.D., with an Introductory Memoir*, 1852) there is a picture of the son accompanying his father every Sunday all the way to Falkirk. There is also a statement that the father continued with Mr. Hunter until his death, when he returned to his original Anti-burgher home in Cumbernauld. Since, however, Mr. Hunter died in 1813 and Dr. Stark's father had predeceased him in his son's manse in 1807, there is some confusion here. But, certainly, some of the Cumbernauld elders or their families were with Mr. Hunter until the end. Evidently, some time before his death, Mr. Hunter had begun to feel his ecclesiastical isolation very keenly, for in 1812 he and his congregation had applied for help to the Old Light Anti-burghers—the Constitution-  
alists. After his death, occasional supply was continued, but, since the stalwarts of the congregation had returned, or were on the point of returning, to the congregations from which they had come, Falkirk itself did not provide a sufficient nucleus for a Constitutionalist cause, and the congregation disappears entirely about 1827.

## V

From the depressing history of this ill-starred attempt to found a new denomination on an incredibly narrow issue *with two incompatibles at the helm*, we turn now to the documents of the controversy. The first written document which I have encountered is that entitled *An Inquiry concerning the Scriptural Order and Method of Dispensing the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*. By Josiah Hunter E.C.M. a pamphlet of 216 pages, published in Falkirk in 1776. But verbal controversy must have been afoot for some time, for Mr. Hunter freely quotes arguments which have been already used and refutes them to his own satisfaction. His *point of departure* is that there is a radical distinction between the two Sacraments of the Christian Church, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism rests on a command of our Lord, accompanied by no demonstration; the Lord's Supper upon a celebration, followed by a command. He prints its fundamental principle in large capitals CHRISTI ACTIO EST NOSTRA INSTITUTIO (p. 47). What, then, precisely, were the actions of our Lord? "First, He took bread. Secondly, He blessed it. Thirdly, He broke it. And, fourthly, He gave it. These actions about the element of bread do point how it is to be taken as a sign for when Christ says "This is my body," it is not the bread simply but AS CLOTHED with these actions about it, by which it is presented and set forth as a singular and sacred sign. Wherefore, when he says "This is my body" the plain, real and just meaning must be that this bread, TAKEN, BLESSED, BROKEN and GIVEN is his body SACRAMENTALLY signified (pp. 16-7). He makes a great show of erudition by not only giving an elaborate analysis of the relevant passages in Matthew, Mark, Luke and Paul, but also printing the translations of these passages in Christian history, from the Syriac down to the Authorised Version, accompanied by comments which, in the case of the Syriac, extend to the parsing of the words (pp. 98-107). And, unfortunately, he indulges his fancy by indicating many alternative thoughts that might occupy the communicants' mind at the moment of the Lifting of the bread. He anticipates the objection that lifting is not expressly mentioned in the Westminster Standards by saying that "whereas these are valuable, and justly to be esteemed, as precious extracts of evangelical truth: yet we surely must offer very great injury to them, when we would propose to put them on a level with the Scriptures" (p. 83). His basic position, therefore, stands, CHRISTI ACTIO EST NOSTRA INSTITUTIO. Two years later appeared the second written document from the pen of Adam Gib. While its title-page is more elaborate; it is itself much shorter and more pithy—*VINDICIAE DOMINICAE; A Defence of the Reformation—standards of the Church of*

*Scotland, concerning the Administration of the Lord's Supper ; and the one Sonship of Jesus Christ : in which some Doctrines of the said Standards, upon these important Subjects, are explained and vindicated.* It runs to eighty-four pages, of which only fifty-one relate to our subject.

Mr. Gib begins by printing in extenso what the Westminster Standards have to say on the administration of the Sacrament. He takes his stand on these as his Ordination vows oblige him to do ; and adds " These Standards were not hasty, loose or raw productions ; but were most deliberately, accurately and maturely digested—under a manifest guidance of the Holy Ghost . . . When the compilers determined against any Taking up of the elements till *after* Prayer, they knew well enough that our Lord took bread *before* prayer : yet they had good reason not only for not allowing,—but for excluding—a pretended Imitation of our Lord's example, in that matter (p. 17). He lays great stress on the incidental circumstances that no one would dream of reckoning as integral parts of the ordinance e.g. it was at night, in an upper room, after supper, with only male communicants, round one table and, presumably—the season being Passover—with unleavened bread. In point of fact, he asserts it would be as easy to " write a pamphlet about the Necessity and Importance of using unleavened bread only at the Sacramental Supper, as about the Necessity and importance of taking the Bread before Prayer " (pp. 50-1). The taking of bread was one of the incidentals, a current Jewish custom. It cannot belong to the permanent usages. Otherwise, what meaning has it? " It is a dumb action, which has no language given to it, no signification put upon it " (p. 40). As to Mr. Hunter's fancies about the various appropriate messages it might convey to the communicant, to incorporate them would be to destroy the unity of the Sacrament—in fact, it would add to it other five—and any human invention added to the Sacrament would be as dangerous now as in the bad old days of the Roman Church. So lifting before prayer—and reading a meaning into it—is just simply another example of the process which gave us Transubstantiation and the Elevation of the Host.

This biting pamphlet of Adam Gib was the direct cause of many petitions from the West—first of all, I think, from Beith—which pled for the Synod's recognition that the Lifter's case was right and that, therefore, Adam Gib should be made to conform. But the first direct reply came from an unexpected quarter :—*A Short Account of the conduct of some of the Secession Judicators, concerning some petitions presented to them for redress of grievances, referring to some late publications by Mr. Adam Gib and Mr. Josiah Hunter. Published by a Committee appointed for that purpose at a general meeting of elders and others from the congregations of Denny, Cumber-*



*nauld, Craigmalen, Borrowstounes, Kernyhill and Stirling. With extracts of the proceedings of the Associate Synod, relative to Mr. Josiah Hunter, Minister of the Gospel in Falkirk, 1777 and 1779 years!* This substantial tract of eighty-eight pages was published in Glasgow in 1782. About one third of it is devoted to an absorbing narration of the obstacles they had encountered in presenting their petitions in fully legal form, in especial the various shifts by which ministers had blocked the way to their consideration in duly convened meetings of the primary courts, the Kirk Sessions. The middle third is all that concerns us. They have been deeply hurt by Adam Gib's pamphlet. They quote quite a number of its vulnerable points, answering them, mainly by quotations from Josiah Hunter's earlier production. There is no fresh contribution to the discussion, but they do make plain—these elders—that they loathe Adam Gib and adore Josiah Hunter. The one new thing is the introduction of a small number of continental divines to give corroborative evidence. This was the tiny snowball that set the avalanche a-going and made the subsequent literature so voluminous.

Later in the year (1782)—and again from an unexpected quarter came the fourth contribution to the debate: *IRENICUM: Inquiry into the importance of the present debate among Seceders, relative to the manner of administering the Lord's Supper, with a view to the Restoration of Order and Peace. In three letters to a friend. By James Ramsay, Minister of the Gospel in Glasgow.* An unexpected quarter indeed! For this weighty attack on the Lifters' positions and actions came from a prominent Glasgow minister, on whom the Lifters had, and not without reason, been reckoning as a committed friend and potential ally. Of the three letters, the first two are models of controversy, in spirit, lucidity and penetration. In writing the third, Mr. Ramsay could not forbear from incorporating some eloquent passages from recent sermons, purple patches of which he was manifestly proud. The whole spirit is markedly more hostile than that of the first two letters, turning what was meant to be an Irenicum into a truculent call for unconditional surrender. Now, James Ramsay was one who, throughout his ministry, had conformed to the practice of the majority in lifting the bread. "He had never deviated," he claims, "in a single instance from the current mode" (p. 5). He had accepted it unthinkingly, from tradition and environment. But now, when the question had been raised, he had looked into the matter more carefully and, as a result of his researches, he could no longer accept it as obligatory, or even fitting. Three things, in particular, had forced him to this conclusion. Firstly, he had subjected the standards and the practice of the Church of Scotland to a close examination. This confirmed him in the conviction that Adam Gib was right in claiming that the Westminster Standards were against this



preliminary lifting. But so was the First Book of Discipline and it was of no avail to set up John Knox's Liturgy as in its favour, for the authority of that manual was disputable. The practice of the Church of Scotland even before 1648 was not so uniform as he had formerly thought and as the Lifters still claimed. His survey of the Scottish past is extremely convincing. It even creates the feeling that it is unanswerable. The second thing that had had weight in changing his convictions was the overwhelming support of the Reformed theological tradition. He gives a conspectus of the venerated teachers in the Calvinist succession who had expressed their judgements on the matter. From John Calvin and Theodore Beza down to Johannes Hoornbeek, he culls well on to thirty citations to confirm his point. It is a most impressive catalogue for I, for one, did not dream that anything like so many had expressed an opinion or even what could be construed into an opinion, on this minor point. But, though his selection conveys an impression of solid agreement, yet, he must have come across some who disagreed. For he seems to anticipate that his opponents may be able to produce almost as formidable an array. (The Cumbernauld group had already produced two). So he concludes "But really, Sir, though all the private writers which you could collect throughout Christendom, were favourable to the opinions and practice for which you plead, it does not appear that they would turn out to great account, while the standards of the Church which you and I have deliberately and solemnly espoused as strictly agreeable to the Word of God, stand opposed to them" (p. 51). But the main reason for his change of view had been a closer scrutiny of the Scripture evidence. He challenges the dictum *ACTIO CHRISTI EST NOSTRA INSTITUTIO* and that, in three respects. In the first place, the Lifters themselves did not follow the whole actions of Christ. They ignored the *ὡσαύτως* of 1 Cor. XI 25. The minister did not lift the Cup and set its contents apart to a holy use by a separate prayer. No Seceder had ever claimed that this *ACTIO* of our Lord should be repeated in the celebration. I must admit that this came as a surprise. For, brought up the Secession tradition, I had always thought that the blessing of the cup was the differentia of that tradition in the observance of the Lord's Supper. It had been universal in my youth. And one felt that it was observed, not merely for the purpose of giving the visiting minister some part in the actual celebration, but for some deeper reason. It may well have been this criticism by James Ramsay that was the driving force in the creation of the tradition. In the second place while it was wrong, as previous writers had done, to treat our Lord's lifting of the bread as among the merely incidental circumstances, it pertained entirely to the institution and not to the observance of the Sacrament. The ancient ceremonial law being on the point of abolition by His death,

our Lord was "in virtue of His supreme authority as King of Zion, solemnly inaugurating a new ordinance in the room of the passover" (p. 73). And no christian minister can dare to take bread as our Lord took it. This was an ACTIO CHRISTI not meant for repetition, nor could it, in any genuine sense, be repeated. In the third place, the Lifters, in common with the bulk of Christendom had totally misconstrued the "This do." They took it as a command to the Apostles as administrators of the Sacrament in days to come. Had this been intended, the words would have come at another place and they would not have been *τοῦτο ποιεῖτε*, but *οὕτως ποιεῖτε*. No, the Apostles were at the moment, communicants; as the words first fell on their ears, they were being given the broken bread; at the second time, the cup was passing into their hands. Had they been in any doubt as to their meaning and asked "Lord, what are we to do?" would he not have answered, "Eat this bread and drink this cup" for as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come" (p. 70). He knows that from this interpretation there will be many dissentients in every church, but, after an elaborate examination of possible variations and qualifications, he maintains that the command was restricted to those actions in which they were immediately engaged as communicants. So, James Ramsay concluded his second letter with the comfortable feeling that he had once for all cut off the whole Scriptural foundation on which his opponents relied. It would have been a much stronger pamphlet if he had left it there and resisted the temptation to score off the Lifters by minor and largely irrelevant subtleties.

The first part of the *Irenicum* seemed, as I said, unanswerable but an answer came, in the most formidable document of the whole series. It must have been in an advanced state of preparation before Mr. Ramsay's publication; but it was modified and enlarged to meet the fresh challenge. Its title is the longest of all. *An Apology and Vindication, or the Practice and Binding Obligation of following Christ's Instruction and Example in the administration of the Lord's Supper, asserted and defended. To which is added an Appendix, containing copies of some Original Papers, with some short account of what transpired at last meeting of Synod in the case of Rev. Mr. David Smyton and a copy of his Declaration of Secession from them and his reasons for so doing. Published by a Committee appointed by order and in name of the Petitioners and Remonstrators in the Associate Congregations in Kilmaurs, Beith, Paisley and Kilwinning! Glasgow, 1783.* Much the largest of the pamphlets, it runs to 128 pages of close print. How a pamphlet of such a size was prepared by four local Committees is a mystery. Its opponents made much of a mysterious individual whom they called the "Joiner", whose business it was to incorporate the four separate assign-

ments into one and who might be regarded as the real author. If there ever was such a person, he took pains not to destroy the illusion of multiple authorship. Here is how it begins. "We, a poor, illiterate, ignorant and despicable handful of the Associate congregations of Kilmaurs, Paisley, Kilwinning and Beith, being, in adorable providence, shut up to the disagreeable necessity of publishing and exhibiting to the world at large, the following relation of the naked truth of real matters of fact and deed . . . desire to speak things, as we know and view them, in the fear of God and as men soon to stand before our Judge, without passion or prejudice to any man's person, feud or favour of any : and that, not so much for our own vindication, as for the vindication of what we take to be the truth ; and to transmit it, so far as we understand it . . . to posterity (p. 1). The least suitable word to be applied to what follows is "illiterate." It is a most learned document, but not, like Mr. Hunter's, pedantic and exhibitionist. Mr. Ramsay must have been greatly taken aback to find his formidable array of Reformed citations countered by one twice as large and quite as relevant, in which several of his own champions appear, e.g. John Calvin, represented by pronouncements more apt and more cogent. His very plausible devaluation of the authority of Knox's Liturgy is shown to be a mistake of ignorance and the Westminster Directory's ignoring of the Lifting put into its proper perspective. It was not meant to exclude the Lifting, as the continuance of the practice in Covenanting Scotland countenanced by divines who, at the Assembly, had helped to frame the Directory, abundantly proves. The appeal to the Reformed tradition and to the Scottish past is marked by diligent research and massive learning and what seemed the impregnable outposts of Mr. Ramsay's position were, if not levelled to the ground, at least, put out of action. Among the many citations, familiar and unfamiliar, there was one from Robert Bruce which, if we could be sure that these elders knew it when they embarked on their Crusade, might well have furnished the call to arms. "Now, though I call these ceremonies, there is never a ceremony which Christ instituted in the Supper, but is as essential as the bread and wine are, and ye cannot leave out one jot of them, except ye pervert the whole institution : for, whatever Christ commanded to be done, whatever he *spoke* or *did* in the whole action, it is essential and must be done ; and ye cannot leave one jot thereof, but ye must pervert the whole action " (p. 50). So far as Scottish and Reformed traditions were concerned, the Lifters had vindicated their practice. This is not to be wondered at, for they had had ample time to assemble and deploy their forces. But what about Mr. Ramsay's unexpected atomic bomb attack? What about the two points of exegesis so confidently asserted? The Committee of elders must have had the minimum of time to prepare to repel this attack. But they



were ready. The first point, that it was a blasphemy to take bread, since our Lord had done it in his capacity of Sovereign Lord of the Universe and Supreme Controller of the worship of his creatures is met by the contention that he did it not only as the Divine Institutor of the Feast, but, being among them as one that serveth, as the first minister of the Sacrament, all of whose actions "as administerer thereof," his ministers are bound to follow. "For, where the Lawgiver makes no distinction, we can make no exception without insulting the language of Divine inspiration, the will and laws of Jesus Christ" (p. 65).

The second point that the "Do this" was addressed to the disciples as recipients and not as future dispensers of the ordinance, they deal with at greater length and with greater pungency. It is a novel interpretation, they assert and a disastrous one. It is disastrous for "if this command, Do this, is to be absolutely restricted to the taking and eating and bound the disciples as communicants only, where is there a warrant in all the New Testament to dispense or administrate this ordinance afterwards in the Church?" (p. 67). That it is also novel, they are prepared to prove. And they proceed to do so, with shattering thoroughness. Beginning with Calvin's Institutes—"he commanded his disciples to do *that* in ministration of the Supper which they had seen him do, when he executed the office of a right distributor" (p. 67)—and going down through Ursinus and Turretin and then, through an array of British divines, they demonstrate to Mr. Ramsay that he stands alone and unsupported. It is this wealth of appropriate quotations available at such short notice which makes me wonder why they should have been thought illiterate. If they could not follow Mr. Ramsay into nice distinctions between Greek idioms, they they certainly knew their Bibles and the Reformed Theologians.

A reply might have been expected from the side of the Synod. But none came. The Lifter Presbytery had been constituted with, greatly to the Synod's relief, only two ministers. And they felt that with two ministers so disparate, the new body was doomed to speedy extinction. But a reply did come from a Burgher minister—a near neighbour of Mr. Ramsay in Glasgow—Rev. John Thomson of Calton:—*Remarks upon a very extraordinary book, entitled, An Apology and Vindication etc. emitted by still more extraordinary authors who design themselves "A poor, illiterate, ignorant and despicable (not despised) handful of the Associate congregations of Kilmaurs, Beith etc. But notwithstanding of this their Profession of Ignorance and want of learning, have commenced expositors (rather wresters) of Scripture and Divine things; belying our Church Standards; arraigning and condemning Church courts, for not passing Decisions agreeable to their Mind. All of which agrees well with the above description*



*the authors give of themselves.* There are 83 pages of it, but those would be no more than 30 if the quotations from the two previous works were excised. It certainly belabours the Lifters. They are "liker men about to engage in a cudgeling bout than Christians who evidence themselves to be followers of the meek and lovely Jesus" (p. 23). He confines himself to points where the Lifters seem to have evaded Mr. Ramsay's challenge, ignoring the fact that most of it was written before the *Irenicum* appeared, and points where they seem to contradict themselves, attributing these to the imperfect co-ordination of portions written independently by the local sections of the General Committee. But he does two useful things. He gives a somewhat biassed, but valuable account of the origin of the Ayrshire squabble, confirming many things I had surmised, some of which I have incorporated earlier in this paper. And he gives a most succinct statement of the real offence of the Lifters. There have, he says, been variations of practice in this matter in all ages of the Christian church "but in no age can you produce any evidence, that any of her Synods or Assemblies, made the taking of bread before prayer *a term of Communion*. Your new Presbytery will have the exclusive honour of doing *this*" (pp. 77-8).

This is, so far as I can ascertain a complete tale of all the pamphlets bearing directly on the Lifter issue, with, I hope, a not unfair indication of the arguments used. There were faults of temper and mistaken tactics on both sides; but, in the case of at least the two main pamphlets, I am left with the impression of men stubbornly battling for the truth as they knew it and sincerely anxious to manifest their loyalty to the complete Reformed tradition, mustering every possible ally in that tradition with a thoroughness rarely equalled in the whole history of theological polemics. Has ever so much sound learning been mobilised in the interests of so little?

## VI

I said, a moment ago, that no reply to the *Apology and Vindication* came from the Anti-burgher Synod, or from any member of the Synod. But the case did not quite disappear from the Synod's agenda. Evidently the *Apology* had shaken the convictions of some of Mr. Ramsay's own congregation. Some elders and more members seem to have become occasional bearers of Mr. Smyton at Kilmaurs, without disjoining themselves from the Glasgow congregation. Not without many obstructions—on account of their equivocal position—these succeeded in getting a new Representation and Appeal, calling for a reversal of the previous de-

cision, on the agenda both of Presbytery and Synod. Both these courts reaffirmed their former plea for mutual tolerance. But the debate having revealed that there was grave disquiet in many congregations, it was resolved to appoint a Committee to prepare a reasoned vindication of this decision. The Committee did nothing for two years. But in the Synod of 1786, one of their up-and-coming young ministers, Rev. Wm. Graham said that, in view of the serious situation in his Newcastle congregation, it was imperative that the Committee should report. This was done and the report adopted. It is printed in McKerrow's *History of the Secession Church* (pp. 330-1). Its five points show the heavy hand of Adam Gib, rather than the subtleties of James Ramsay. And, of course, it stresses the point made by John Thomson about separation on so minute a scruple. But the Deed has a preamble, which MacKerrow does not print. This is an account of the origin of the schism, designed to discourage any others from joining them. It is interesting to note that the Synod, while not availing itself of the opportunity of recalling the dubious records of most of the ministers of the Lifter Presbytery, committed itself to this statement concerning the leaders, whose record was above reproach: "Mr. Smyton, evidently under the influence of some turbulent and heady men—practising upon the infirmity of his mind in old age—was led to the very undutiful conduct of stating a separation from them" (Minutes p. 451). Nothing was more likely to deter sympathisers from becoming adherents than this picture of a senile puppet moved by the strings of born rebels. It is to be noted that three prominent ministers, Messrs. Bunyan of Howgate, Turnbull of Ayton and Whytock of Dalkeith "Craved that it might be marked that they did not concur in this Deed as dreading what might be the consequences of it" (*Ibid.* p. 454). But the dreaded consequences did not follow. Whatever local troubles continued or emerged they never reached the Synod. This, so far as I can discover, is its final word on the matter

I made mention, a few minutes ago, of mistaken tactics on both sides. And my last word must be on the mistaken tactics of the Lifters. For, if their demands had been more moderate, if they had asked for a Synodical commendation of their practice as preferable and not a universal prescription of it; or even if they had accepted the Synod's counsel of mutual toleration, being content to live and let live, they would, indubitably, have won their case. But the will o' the wisp of an enforced conformity lured them to their extinction and irreparable damage to the cause for which they fought. I say with some assurance that, with less aggressive methods, they could have secured the general observance of the practice they loved. I say this, because of one factor extraneous to the controversy itself. It is this. When the strife was only in its initial stages—

away in the far North, in the manse of Canisbay—a young Parish Minister, John Morison, was putting the finishing touches to that Paraphrase which was, so soon, to become *the* Communion Hymn of the Church of Scotland.

'Twas on that night when doomed to know,  
The eager rage of every foe,  
That night on which He was betrayed,  
The Saviour of the world took bread :

While it says no more than Adam Gib conceded, inevitably its status as the Communion Hymn would have brought Communion practice into conformity with itself.

In fact, there might have been a double lifting—of the bread and of the cup—but for the disrepute that had fallen on the practice of lifting from the intransigence of its champions. For the other relevant part of the Paraphrase as Morison submitted it to the Committee ran thus :

Then, taking in His hands the cup  
To Heav'n anew He thanks sent up—

Though amended and improved in the final version, it remains quite as definite as to lifting.

Then, in His hands the cup He raised  
And God anew He thanked and praised ;

The premature pressing of uniformity had defeated the Lifters' own ends.

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